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FUNERALS, DEATH, AND DYING

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Editor's Introduction

Iowa District East's *Theological Journal for the Church* was a project conceived over ten years ago in 2012. The intent and purpose of this theological journal was for the training and building up of the theological acumen of the laity of member congregations of IDE. The journal received positive feedback during its time in publication, both among IDE's clergy and laity. However, after only three published issues, the journal remained inactive for ten years. We are pleased to bring back this wonderful blessing for our Church.

This is a theological journal, written by the pastors of IDE, for the laity of IDE. The pastors will not be discussing Greek or Hebrew, nor will the essays and articles included in this journal deal with advanced theological topics. Nonetheless, the authors will strive to lead the laity into a deeper understanding of the various theological topics that this journal will address. The journal will be published twice a year—the first issue of each volume will be published in the Spring and the second issue of each volume will be published in the Fall.

The theme of this issue deals with death, dying, cremation, euthanasia, and the Christian funeral. All of these topics are important in our day and age, especially since we as Christians live in an increasingly secular, and seemingly Gnostic society. While these topics may seem grim or morbid, every author in this issue faithfully stresses and confesses the Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting, which is ours in Jesus Christ, "For Christ, having been raised from the dead, has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

In this issue and subsequent issues, the reader will enjoy a number of articles on a particular subject, a book review, and a column which will review a particular hymn from *The Lutheran Service Book* (LSB). Special thanks is due to President Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders as the General Editor of this project, Mr. Daniel Sanchez who serves as the layout editor, and to all my clergy brothers who have spent generous amounts of time writing and researching to make this happen.

We hope you will enjoy this issue of IDE's *Theological Journal for the Church* and that you find it edifying.

Rev. Thomas C. Van Hemert
Managing Editor
Monday after Exaudi, 2024

**Theological Journal for the Church is a publication of Iowa District East of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The articles are written by pastors in the district for the edification and education of our laity. The Executive Editor is Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders, President of Iowa District East.
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Death With Dignity?

A Christian Response to Euthanasia

Pastor Jay Weideman

Introduction

The following essay will discuss the practice of euthanasia. As support continues to rise among the American populace, states across the nation are legalizing, or are in the process of legalizing, euthanasia. Christians must clearly refute and condemn euthanasia and do so with conviction, courage, and vigor.

Definitions, Terminology, and Word Games

First, what is euthanasia? Literally, the word euthanasia means “good death.” The term was formerly used to speak of an easy and painless death. Now the term is employed when referring to the putting to death of a person suffering from an incurable disease or illness, however, some advocates seek to broaden access to euthanasia beyond what the medical establishment deems an incurable disease or illness. Often, this is done by doctors giving individuals a lethal medication for self-administration (sometimes distinguished from euthanasia as “physician-assisted suicide”). Other times, the doctor himself is the one administering the lethal drug (sometimes referred to specifically as euthanasia). Advocates often will use other terms such as “death with dignity,” “assistance in death,” and “medical aid in dying.” These terms are used to make euthanasia palatable.

Essential to the case made by proponents of euthanasia is the notion that euthanasia presents a “dignified” way

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to die. Yet, as is so often the case when the term dignity is employed, they rarely care to explain what dignity means. They also fail to explain what a dignified death is and how euthanasia constitutes such a death. Speaking of dignity and “death with dignity” in such vacuous ways allows the terms to be used according to the needs of the advocates of euthanasia to justify the practice. How could anyone ever be opposed to something called “death with dignity?” Thus, the phrase is used without significant explanation with hopes of making euthanasia more acceptable to people.

When advocates do take the time to explain more of what they mean by dignity and a dignified death, they tend to say that dignity is tethered to human autonomy, that is, our ability to freely choose and make decisions for ourselves. Those who advocate for euthanasia say that euthanasia is a dignified way to die because a free individual has made the choice to die in the manner he determines instead of as a result of some incurable disease, as if a dignified death is a death on our own terms. The assumption of what makes euthanasia in these cases “dignified” is that it is based on individual choice and consent, whereas death from an incurable disease robs the individual of that choice and thus, apparently, is undignified. The act itself has very little to do with making it a dignified death. However, moral considerations cannot be reduced to a simple matter of choice and consent. The rightness or wrongness of an action lies first and foremost in the inherent goodness or wickedness of the act itself. This is something God determines, not man.

What about other cases in which an individual does not have a choice, perhaps because of some incapacity? In these cases, advocates claim that euthanasia is a dignified means to die because it alleviates excessive suffering and pain. Here, too, there are problems. Suffering and pain are simply assumed to be undignified; they rarely explain how or why this is the case. The goal of modern healthcare, it would appear, would be to eliminate, not just alleviate, suffering and pain. After all, a painful death is somehow a death without dignity, whereas a painless death is one with dignity, and thus we must seek to die in a way that is without pain. The things that this could lead to are scary to imagine! We Christians must be careful how we speak about pain and death, as if the “good way to go” is pain-free. This is a worldly manner of speaking. Indeed, the very notion that there is such a thing as a death with dignity, is fraught with problems and must be challenged as will be done below. Suffice it to say, advocates promote euthanasia largely by playing word games and manipulating language in such a way as to make euthanasia seem not only morally permissible but even merciful and morally good.

Health officials make distinctions between different “types” of euthanasia.¹ As the Synod’s CTCR study from 1979 on euthanasia rightly points out, these distinctions and modifications of euthanasia cause a great deal of confusion and are primarily employed to desensitize the issue.² In some cases the distinctions are simply inaccurate.³ Ultimately, these distinctions made by healthcare professionals simply have no real moral or ethical significance and contribute nothing to the making of a moral judgment on the matter. Euthanasia, properly understood, under any and every circumstance is morally wrong and sinful.

Euthanasia in America

Throughout the United States, euthanasia continues to gain support, both in terms of public approval and legalization. According to research conducted by Gallup in 2018, 72 percent of Americans say “doctors should be able to help terminally ill patients die,” though that support drops to 65 percent when the language is changed to include the words “commit suicide,” and it drops further to 54 percent when the question directly asks about the moral acceptability of

euthanasia.⁴ Given that the legalization of euthanasia is a matter of state law, different states have different laws. Ten states and the District of Columbia have legalized “medical aid in dying.”⁵ Numerous other states, including Iowa, have bills that have been introduced to legalize euthanasia and are still pending.⁶

Response

Any Christian response to euthanasia must begin by stating this simple fact: God created us to live. He did not create us to die. Death is a reality of life in a fallen world because God punishes sin and evil. Man, since the Fall, is naturally sinful. This is quite clear from Genesis 1-3. Life is the gift God gives to mankind as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2; death is the punishment against sin as warned of in Genesis 2:17 and imposed in Genesis 3:19. Death is the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Life is the intention of God. Life is natural; death is unnatural. We are creatures created by our Creator to live. Gilbert Meilaender, a Lutheran ethicist and theologian, rightly notes that it is contradictory to our nature as creatures to be unwilling to receive life moment by moment from the hand of God.⁷ Every moment of life, which may include moments involving great suffering and pain, are God’s gift to us, even moments when we might suffer with pain. We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14) and the unjust taking of life is always an affront and attack on the God who created us to live.

Death is the very opposite of what God intends for us. Given that death puts an end to God’s creative purpose and original intent for us, which is to live, it is inherently undignified as is the case with everything that is contrary to the will of God. As defined by culture, there is no such thing as a “death with dignity.” One may be able to handle death in a dignified way, but there is no such thing, no matter the manner or form, as a good and dignified death. To speak of “death with dignity” is to engage in “unholy rhetoric.”⁸ Again, we were created to live, and thus, life is dignified. We were not created to die, thus, death lacks all dignity.

To speak clearly and plainly, we must say that euthanasia is an example of breaking the Fifth Commandment. The Fifth Commandment condemns murder, and euthanasia is a form of murder.⁹ Whether eutha-

anasia is physician assisted but self-induced or physician induced makes no difference. Euthanasia remains murder, no matter the method, and willing participants are guilty of participating in such. There is no biblical justification to end life because of an incurable disease or because of the amount of suffering and pain. God determines when the taking of life is justified. He reveals when the taking of life is permitted, which is why God institutes Capital Punishment (Genesis 9:5-6). We could say that the general rule is to not take life. There are exceptions to this general rule because of sin, and the reason behind these exceptions is the execution of justice. To take a life because of disease, illness, or suffering is not an act of executing justice for any wrongdoing on a guilty individual, and thus it is not permitted. It belongs to God and to Him alone to give and to take back what He has given, including life itself (Job 1:21).

We must approach this issue, and every other life issue, knowing that our life belongs to God who has given it to us. Our life is a gift from Him from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. We are God's creatures. We are not our own creators. The desire for autonomy, the desire for control over life and death, is but another example of man trying to act as a little god. Choice does not make something morally good and acceptable when the action that is chosen is forbidden by God and contrary to His unchanging will. Moreover, if choice and self-determination were so important, as Meilaender has noted, then how can we impose any limitations whatsoever to euthanasia? Why do some proponents say it is limited to just those who are suffering greatly or have an incurable disease or illness? Is not limiting the ability of some to choose death as they see fit limiting their ability to die with dignity given that a dignified death is a death that is chosen? Besides, who gets to decide what is a sufficient amount of suffering and what is not? For that matter, who gets to define suffering? Also, if euthanasia were so merciful of an option, why not impose it on those who do not have a choice given that it would still be showing them mercy, if this were the case, which, obviously it is not?¹⁰

How should Christians respond to suffering? How do we care for those who are enduring an incurable disease or who are in great pain? It is safe to say that our

culture is preoccupied with the notion that suffering is something that in every case and at every stage of life must be minimized. This is not to say that we ought not respond to suffering with compassion. Instead, the principle that should govern how we as Christians show compassion is not to "minimize suffering," but "maximize care."¹¹ If our sole aim were to eliminate suffering, the only way to do that effectively would be to eliminate those who suffer, which is, of course, precisely what euthanasia does. However, this is neither showing Christian care nor Christian compassion. Care and compassion express themselves in love, and love flows from God's character and is patterned after His work. How does God express His love to His children who are suffering? He does not necessarily remove the suffering or minimize the pain, at least not in this present life. Our Lord Jesus Himself suffered and endured great pain. Yet in all things God uses them for a purpose by bringing good from them. This is true both in the case of the sufferings that come from living the Christian life (Romans 5:1-5) and the sufferings that come as a result of God disciplining us because of our sin (Hebrews 12:4-11). Though suffering is not a good thing, and though only the suffering for the sake of Christ is suffering we ought to rejoice in, God governs all things and uses all things, including our suffering, for our good as believers (Romans 8:28). God brought good from the suffering of Jesus for Him, and He will do so for us.

Suffering and pain present an opportunity for care, compassion, and love. Human care, especially the care for man's health, must always seek to accomplish God's design for humanity, which is life. Euthanasia, which purposefully ends life, is not a caring, compassionate, or loving option, and so, it is not an option for Christians who live life governed by love.¹²

We need to gain a right understanding of suffering, learn how to suffer, and to care for those who are suffering. The current level of support for euthanasia is concerning, but truthfully it is just a reflection that our society has a wrong understanding of suffering, exhibits a refusal and inability to suffer, and lacks the capacity to care for those who are suffering. The culture of death is a culture that says "just end it now" to a life of suffering and thinks that is a caring option. Such is the Spirit of the age. Christians must promote the culture

of life, which even at the end of life, even in the midst of great suffering, receives every moment of life as a gracious gift from God. We must likewise call to repentance those who advocate for and assist in such a practice as euthanasia. We do so with the hope that they may know that God has on account of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross forgiven every sin in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. We pray that they may personally receive and benefit from the forgiveness of their sins by the faith wrought by the Holy Spirit.



¹ Health professionals make the following distinctions when speaking about euthanasia: “assisted suicide vs. euthanasia,” “active vs. passive,” and “voluntary vs. non-voluntary.”

² *Report on Euthanasia With Guiding Principles*, a Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as prepared by its Social Concerns Committee October 1979 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 9.

³ Consider the distinction between “active” and “passive” euthanasia. Passive euthanasia is wrongly defined as the discontinuance of extraordinary life-sustaining treatment. That is neither properly nor colloquially speaking euthanasia. See *Report on Euthanasia*, 7-8.

⁴ Megan Brenan, “Americans’ Strong Support for Euthanasia Persists,” Gallup, May 31, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/235145/americans-strong-support-euthanasia-persists.aspx>.

⁵ The ten states are as follows: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. For a full update on the legal status of euthanasia in each state, see www.deathwithdignity.org/states.

⁶ “H.F. 612- The Iowa Our Care, Our Options Act,” Iowa Legislature, accessed April 7, 2024, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ba=HF612&ga=90>

⁷ Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 58.

⁸ *Report on Euthanasia With Guiding Principles*, 18.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 88-89 and Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 59-88.

¹⁰ Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 63.

¹¹ Meilaender, *Bioethics*, 65.

¹² This is not to say that we must use every extraordinary means and take every extraordinary measure to prolong life in every circumstance. The lack of using these means does not actively terminate life, as is the case in euthanasia, but simply allows life to take its course.

On the Body, Cremation, and the Confessions

Pastor Caleb Schewe

Introduction

The task of this specific document is to delve into what our Lutheran Confessions have to say regarding the human body and to engage the Scripture's witness on the human body and cremation.

Every article in the Book of Concord applies to the human body, because every article in the Book of Concord has something to say about Christ. To help focus on the issue, we will follow the pattern of the Solid Declaration Article II, regarding Free Will. As the article on Free Will explains that the will of man is found in various unlike states, we can discuss the state of the human body in a similar manner:

What is the body before the fall?

What is the body after the fall, but before regeneration? ¹

What is the body after regeneration, but before physical death? ²

What is the body after physical death, but before the resurrection?

What is the body after the resurrection?

To achieve the necessary brevity of this document, we'll focus on the body:

after regeneration but before physical death;

after physical death but before the resurrection.

Through such contemplation, we'll have deeper appre-

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ciation of the body the Lord knitted together in the womb, drenched at the font, made a temple of His Spirit, nourished with Body and Blood of Christ at the prepared table, and of which, our Lord isn't yet done.

PART I: *What is the body after regeneration but before physical death?*

The Old Testament speaks of the body as God's handiwork. "Your hands have formed and fashioned me; I am fearfully and wonderfully made."³ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."⁴ As the Solid Declaration's article on Original Sin confesses, our body itself is not sin.⁵ *This point is extremely important.* We confess in the meaning of the First Article of the Creed, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures." In making you, God did not make sin.⁶ Your flesh, while corrupted by sin, is not sin itself. You cannot point to an arm, an eye, or even one of the numbered hairs on your head and say, "That itself is sin."

There is a goodness to your body because your body is made by God. If the Psalmist can say, "The heavens declare the glory of God,"⁷ then how much more your body! The heavens are not made in the image and likeness of God, but when you look upon man, to a degree, you can see an image and likeness of God. A tainted image for now, yes, but not tainted forever. You are being renewed in the image and likeness of God by the washing and regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. By its very essence, the body of man is elevated above the heavenly beings, for no angel has flesh and blood the way the Son of Man does. No angel can sing at Christmas, "Unto us angels is born this day

in the city of David a Savior,” but the angels are glad to sing, “Unto *you* is born this day in the city of David a Savior.”

If our body is a good creation of God *even before regeneration*, our body is all the more elevated after regeneration. Before regeneration, we cannot say that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. After regeneration, we can. Before regeneration, we cannot say that God places His name upon us. After regeneration, we can. Your body is raised alive out of the font. God does not raise sin. Your mouth is filled with good things at the Holy Communion. As Jesus once breathed into man's nostrils and the man became a living being, Jesus breathes His Holy Spirit upon you while saying, “Peace be with you.” Your body is purchased with the holy, precious blood of Jesus, and even now He shelters your body in the palm of His hand.

The body, after regeneration, grows in Christian virtue.⁸ We glorify God in our own bodies, and do so more and more. This is laid out in the Solid Declaration's article IV on Good Works. “Truly good works are done not by our own natural powers, but in this way: when a person is reconciled with God through faith and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Or, as Paul says, a person is 'created in Christ Jesus for good works.’”⁹ In Christ, your body is a good tree eager for good works in keeping with repentance.¹⁰ In the True Vine,¹¹ you have a source—Jesus Himself—in which you do every good work prepared for you to do from before the foundation of the world.¹²

In the Solid Declaration article XI on God's Eternal Foreknowledge and Election it says, “The Holy Spirit dwells in the elect, who have become believers, as in His temple. He is not idle in them, but moves God's children to obey God's commands. Therefore, believers, too, should not be idle, much less resist the work of God's Spirit. They should practice all Christian virtues, in all godliness, modesty, temperance, patience, and brotherly love; and they should give all diligence to make their calling and election sure.”¹³

The Christian virtues which we practice anticipate our bodily resurrection, with utmost confidence that even now we train for what we will be.¹⁴ You are God's children now; you will be like Him.¹⁵ We were

meant for holiness; we shall arrive at completed holiness in the resurrection.

With a foundation grounded in what the regenerate body is, after baptism and before physical death, let us now move to the question, “How does this inform our understanding and treatment of the body after physical death and before the bodily resurrection?”

PART II: *What is the body after death, but before the resurrection?*

The body after death and before the resurrection is still part of God's creation. It remains elevated above the beasts of the earth, fish of the sea, birds of the sky. It is more noble and honored than the heavenly bodies. Of all material things on this earth, the body of the redeemed who has fallen asleep is still holy. Holy, in light of what that body has done in his or her life, and holy in anticipation of what that body will be in the resurrection. The body experiences a pause from union with the soul, in confidence the two will be joined anew.

The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds extol God who makes all things, visible and invisible. When considering how to treat our neighbor's body after death, we confess that God the Father made this body, God the Son redeemed this body by His blood, God the Holy Spirit sanctified this body to be His temple¹⁶ – God is not done with this body yet. In this life, flesh and blood bodies and organs are instrumental in justifying faith. While flesh and blood does not reveal that “Thou art the Christ,”¹⁷ it's just as true that without flesh and blood, one cannot receive this justifying faith. See Augsburg Confession Article V on the ministry.¹⁸

Glorifying God in your body includes glorifying God in your body in death, confident that those who die in Christ live. In death, your body is still not your own. Still, you are bought with a price. This is why when a saint falls asleep in Christ – to use our Lord's favorite euphemism for physical death – we ought to treat the body with reverence, care, and respect. Holy things have been done to that body by the Lord, and in the resurrection, holy things will continue to be done by our Lord to that body. The Christian body, even in death, is for good works. The good works which witness that death is swallowed up in victory.

The question, “What is man?” and even, “What is man's body?” is not limited to so-called first, second, or third article theology.¹⁹ Just as we do not separate the two natures of Christ, we should not separate man's body from man's soul. By necessity, we must occasionally speak of the separation of body and soul, but as we do, we know they will be joined in the resurrection and by design, they were not meant to be rent asunder. Neither will they always be rent asunder.

Someone might say, “Everything is going to be burned up on the last day, so why does it matter if we burn the body sooner with cremation?” Scripture bears no witness that the bodies of the faithful will burn. 1 Peter 3, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, speak of the heavenly bodies being burned up, the works done on the earth exposed, the destruction of the ungodly,²⁰ *but there is no mention of the bodies of the saints being burned.* Apart from being burnt up with the heavenly bodies, the saints are caught up together with the Lord. They, with their bodies, enter the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world.²¹ Whether those who have fallen asleep in Christ or those who remain alive with their bodies, their flesh and blood is not destined for fire. In Genesis 3, the Lord told Adam “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” That is not the same as “You are ash and to ash you shall return.” This knowledge, too, should guide the decisions we make with the body of those who have fallen asleep.

Part III: *The Burial and Resurrection of Jesus Informs Our Own Burial and Resurrection*

The Creeds embolden our own confession of faith and give encouragement as we yearn for the Lord to quickly come. As Jesus united Himself to us in every way that we are – yet without sin – we trust that we are united to Him. He blazed the way through death and the grave to a glorious resurrection, bursting the gullet of death so that all who live and believe on Jesus never die. As John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus to die, Jesus prepared the way for John and us to live.

“Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man. He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His

mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh.”²²

The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds confess, “He suffered and was buried.” The Athanasian Creed does not speak of His death until it first speaks of His resurrection. Thus, the Athanasian Creed is worded more positively, speaking of victory of life before mentioning His death. The Athanasian Creed lacks mention of His burial, perhaps following the Psalm that says, “His flesh did not see corruption.”

The Athanasian Creed has stronger emphasis on the bodily resurrection. “At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give an account of their own works.”²³ The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are not worded, “rise again with their bodies.” Rather, I believe “in the resurrection of the body.”

Conclusion

In C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*, there is a moment when the character Mark Studdock is told to deface a crucifix by repetitiously stomping on it. Mark couldn't bring himself to do it. He understood there is something profound about a crucifix, even if the crucifix isn't actually the body of our Lord Jesus.

Mark Studdock paused and considered what was on the floor at his feet. When considering cremation and the body, let us pause. What is the body of the saint?

What is your body, even after you suffer physical death? Still a temple. Dormant for a time, perhaps. It will see corruption to some degree, returning to the dust, but not to return to ash unless something else acts upon it. It is still a body in which good works were done, and in which good works will once again be done. It is still a body that made the good confession of faith and which will make the good confession of faith again. It is not to be discarded, but planted, building on our Lord's imagery in John 12 and Paul's imagery in 1 Corinthians 15. Not to be consumed, but consigned to a place of rest until its ears are opened through a mighty “Ephphatha!” and graves give up the dead and we all arise.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.



¹This document defines the regenerate as a believer in Christ Jesus as established in the Augsburg Confession articles 3 – 5 on *The Son of Man, Justification, and The Ministry*.

²This document defines physical death as the separation of body and soul, i.e., Jesus said that Lazarus died, his body and soul were no longer united.

³Psalm 139:13-14

⁴Jeremiah 1:5

⁵“First, it is true that Christians should regard and recognize the actual transgression of God's commandments as sin; but sin is also that horrible, dreadful hereditary sickness by which the entire human nature is corrupted. This should above all things be regarded and recognized as sin indeed.” SD, I, 5.

“But a distinction must also be maintained between our nature as created and preserved by God (in which sin is indwelling) and original sin (which dwells in the nature). These two things can, and must, be considered, taught, and believed separately according to Holy Scripture.” SD, I, 33.

⁶See AC XIX, The Cause of Sin.

⁷Psalm 19:1

⁸For consideration, all the physical and tangible good works done by the blessed in Matthew 25:31-46.

⁹FC, SD, IV, 7.

¹⁰Matthew 3:8

¹¹John 15:1-4

¹²Ephesians 2:10

¹³FC, SD, XI, 73.

¹⁴1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1, Ephesians 5:1, expects the regenerate, *in their body*, will imitate Christ. You are meant to be Christ-like. Even now we have the pleasure of practicing Christ-like living, keeping our body under discipline as we train for our future life. See 1 Corinthians 9:27 and Proverbs 12:1.

¹⁵1 John 3

¹⁶*Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, Committal, p. 130.

¹⁷Matthew 16:17

¹⁸“That we may obtain this [justifying] faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as though instruments, the Holy Spirit is given.” AC, V, 1-2.

¹⁹Referring to the three articles of the Apostle's Creed.

²⁰Included is also the teaching of John the Baptist and our Lord's various parables. The chaff are burned, not the wheat. The bad tree is burned, not the good. The bad fish are thrown away, not the good. The goats are told, “Depart into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” The righteous enter eternal life. Matthew 3:12, 7:19, 13:48, 25:41.

²¹1 Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 25

²²Athanasian Creed.

²³*Lutheran Service Book*, p. 319.

WE BELIEVE, THEREFORE, WE SING!...?

Pastor Nathan Wille

We have all been to funerals that have at least one of the following hymns sung: *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB) 801 “How Great Thou Art,” LSB 744 “Amazing Grace,” LSB 727 “On Eagles’ Wings,” LSB 748 “I’m But A Stranger Here,” and LSB 770 “What A Friend We Have In Jesus.” While these hymns are a frequent selection for funerals, we do have an entire corpus of hymnody that speak well to the faith of the deceased, which he confessed.

The funeral service is becoming increasingly rare. Yet, in our churches, the Christian funeral is commonplace, even expected. It is also the Church’s opportunity to boldly confess the Resurrection of the Body. The unbelieving world simply does not do this. Our faith is robust, and real. It confesses that the body in the casket will live again. Let us sing accordingly.

In preparing for funerals, the pastor’s responsibility is to assist the family in selecting hymns that communicate Christ’s Resurrection, comfort, and peace. What are some funeral hymns that boldly confess this robust faith? When it comes to looking for funeral hymns, we need to consider a few criteria. Does it refer to the Resurrection of the Body, comfort, hope, or the Sacraments? Does it discuss death as having been defeated? Does it speak clearly about Jesus? There are practical considerations as well. How long is the hymn? Is it suited for congregational singing? Is it one that our congregation knows? And perhaps the biggest question

should be - does it highlight parts of the Scripture readings?

There are several popular texts chosen to be read at the Christian funeral. Most of the time, the pastor simply chooses the passages. I have found that having a hymn before and after the sermon can introduce the themes of the sermon or reinforce the theme of the service. For example, “I am Jesus’ Little Lamb” pairs well with Jesus’ Good Shepherd Discourse in John 10. “I am Content! My Jesus Ever Lives” works well with the account of Simeon holding the baby Jesus. “What is the World to Me?” pairs well with John 12:20-26. But the sermon hymns (before and after) are not the only hymns sung at the funeral.

Because of its proximity to the “Remembrance of Baptism” portion of the liturgy (LSB, 278), the processional or entrance hymn (depending on how funerals are conducted) could focus on themes of baptism, entrance into the Kingdom of God, and death, to name a few. Consideration should be given to the size of the family, especially if the first hymn is the processional hymn. You won’t necessarily want to sing “All Who Believe and Are Baptized” (LSB 601) which has two stanzas, if the family is four generations and consists of some 75 members. This could cause undue stress on organists, knowing that they would have to play *something* for the remaining two to four minutes that it would take for the entire family to be seated in the nave. Some strong candidates for the processional/entrance hymns are as follows: LSB 708 “Lord, Thee I Love With All My Heart,” LSB 604 “I Bind Unto Myself Today,” LSB 420 “Christ, the Life of all the Living,” LSB 464 “The Strife is O’er,” LSB 639 “Wide Open Stand

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the Gates,” LSB 674 “Jerusalem, O City Fair and High,” and LSB 677 “For all the Saints.”

This list, which is by no means exhaustive, gives an array of options that are not only full of theological insight, but also set the tone for the funeral service. They are all of significant length, and speak boldly of the life which the departed now shares with Jesus.

There could be many different ways of speaking/singing a Psalm, but consideration could be given to Psalm paraphrases, such as: LSB 709 (Psalm 23) “The King of Love My Shepherd Is,” LSB 820 (Psalm 103) “My Soul, Now Praise Thy Maker,” LSB 656/657 (Psalm 46) “A Mighty Fortress, and LSB 607 (Psalm 130) “From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee.”

Again, this list is by no means exhaustive, and a fuller list of Psalm paraphrases is found in the *Lutheran Service Book Hymn Selection Guide*.

As mentioned before, the hymns before and/or after the sermon should probably be tied to the readings of the day and the theme of the sermon. Perhaps the pastor will use hymns that he sang with the loved one before he died. The pastor does well to consider the way in which the saint expressed the faith when choosing hymns.

If there is a soloist who would like to sing a selection of music during the service, it might be better to have him sing after the sermon. If there was an appropriate time to sing an additional hymn, it could be immediately following the sermon, so as to provide some sentimental comfort, but not distract from the rest of the propers of the day. The prayer service before the visitation is a perfect time for these things. If there is a friend of the family, or someone whose singing was dearly appreciated by the departed, consider having them sing parts of the Psalm, or a stanza of a hymn.

The closing hymn also has a very important purpose. The family is going to the place where the body of their loved one is going to be left, the place from which it will spring forth on the Last Day. The spouse of the departed is going to leave their loved one behind, and the body which is laid to rest will lie in hope. Some appropriate themes for this junction in the funeral service include, but are not limited to: The Resurrection of the Body, Jesus’ presence with us (or the departed), Eternal Life, thanksgiving, hope, the future, and the reunion of the saints in paradise. Considera-

tion can also be given to singing at the graveside. *The Lutheran Service Book Agenda* recommends two stanzas of LSB 878 “Abide With Me” to be sung at the graveside.

One time, I assigned the first four stanzas of LSB 741 “Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense” as the closing/recessional hymn. We sang the last four stanzas at the graveside. For this particular hymn, the emphasis of the first four stanzas is one that speaks to the reality of dying in Christ. The last four stanzas proclaim the Resurrection of the Body; the hope of eternal life; and our new and glorified bodies. Also, if someone is unfamiliar with the tune, they will have had four opportunities to sing the melody with the help of the organ/pianist leading them. I have also found that the popular Easter hymn, LSB 461 “I Know that My Redeemer Lives” is an appropriate hymn sung at the grave which will one day give up its dead.

A few hymns that are appropriate for the recessional hymn are as follows: LSB 490 “Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won,” LSB 676 “Behold, A Host, Arrayed in White,” LSB 458 “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands,” LSB 516 “Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying,” LSB 508 “The Day is Surely Drawing Near,” LSB 548 “Thanks to Thee, O Christ, Victorious,” LSB 482 “This Joyful Eastertide,” LSB 480 “He’s Risen, He’s Risen,” and LSB 672 “Jerusalem, the Golden.”

Hymns for the committal service (at the graveside or crematory) should focus on the Resurrection of the Body; the day of Judgment; or Life Eternal. The next time that the body in the casket will be seen will be on the day of the Resurrection. We can and should taunt the grave alongside the Apostle Paul, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55) Just about any Easter hymn will convey this sentiment well. A few hymns or phrases of hymns say it better than others: “O where is thy sting, death? We fear thee no more...” (LSB 480:4); “My flesh in hope shall rest, and for a season slumber; till trump’ from east to west shall raise the dead in number...” (LSB 482:3); “He lives and grants me daily breath. He lives and I shall conquer death...” (LSB 461:7); “Glorified, I shall anew with this flesh then be enshrouded. In this body I shall view God my Lord with eyes unclouded” (LSB 741:5); “First to break the bars of death, Thou hast opened Heav’n to faith” (LSB 940:4); “The final trumpet then shall sound, and all the dead be wakened...” (LSB 508:2).

Our hymnody confesses powerful truths in ways that stick with us. The words resonate in our ears long after the service, due in no small part to the music to which they are set. What do you want your family to remember as they commend your body to the ground? Where should their comfort be found? The Resurrection of the Body. What good is grace, if not received by faith? Let our hymnody confess that which we confess, and those who are gathered to celebrate your eternal life in Christ will not soon forget what you believed. Let our hymnody confess what others too can have in Christ.



A BOOKLET OF COMFORT FOR THE SICK & ON THE CHRISTIAN KNIGHT

Pastor Andrew Gray

In the explanation of the seventh petition of the Lord's Prayer, but deliver us from evil, the Christian asks that the Lord will deliver him from all terrors of body and soul and grant a blessed end. (SC, III, 19-20) The question then remains how is one delivered from these terrors and from where does that blessed end come?

Johann Spangenberg was a contemporary of Martin Luther and served as pastor in Nordhausen, Germany. After a significant fire in his city, Spangenberg began work on these treatises to provide answers to these very questions. Christians still find themselves asking for instruction on these very questions surrounding sickness and dying today and answers from 500 years ago are still relevant.

The first booklet, *A Booklet of Comfort for the Sick*, was written for children to prepare themselves to face the difficulties of death. We today would scarcely think such a text is suitable for children, but we do this to our own detriment. The passages of comfort that Spangenberg uses to teach how to die well apply to all who profess the name of Christ. We do not know the day or the hour when we may need these very passages of comfort to be readily accessible to us.

In *On the Christian Knight*, Spangenberg teaches how the Christian lives his daily life in the fight against the devil. He points out that God has not left the Christian to fend for himself. Rather with the tools that he pro-

vides, namely the Word and Sacraments, we are prepared to fight against the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature.

He also paints a nice picture comparing the life of the Christian to the life of the Israelites being rescued from the hand of Pharaoh and finally brought into the promised land. He goes on to paint another picture about the law and the gospel using Mount Sinai, Mount Calvary, and Mount Tabor as devotional points to consider on the journey of the Christian life.

If you have ever struggled to find passages of Scripture to speak to friends and family in the midst of death, this book would be a worthwhile addition to your reading list. Spangenberg does a wonderful job of providing simple explanations of hope in the midst of the trials of life, sickness, and death. These explanations are all rooted deeply in the Gospel, that even these enemies are overcome through the cross of Christ. It may also serve as an example for others that we need resources like this to be written in our day. The battles that wage against us from sin, death, and the devil are still here, but so is the sure and certain victory that we have through Jesus. All ages would do well to hear that message in a simple way. Through the hope presented here, rooted in Scripture, we too learn to come to a blessed end in the faith.

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SPEAKING OF HYMN...

LSB 810: O God of God, O Light of Light

Pastor Nathan Wille

Some hymns stick with you for a long time. That is certainly my history with this particular hymn. I first learned it while playing organ at Trinity Lutheran Church in Conroy, Iowa. Such a simple melody, rife with images and encouragement, especially in times of darkness.

The simple melody of this hymn might seem to be a little underwhelming, but the consistency of the meter and its soaring melody beg to be sung boldly. Originally seated in the “Epiphany” section of *The Lutheran Hymnal*, and weighing in at 5 stanzas, this hymn has now found itself one stanza shorter, and in a more usable section of the *Lutheran Service Book*, titled “Praise and Adoration.”

The hymn begins its confession by reciting words from the Nicene creed, “light of light, very God of very God...” and is undoubtedly speaking of the Christ, the bright and morning Star (Revelation 22:16). It confesses Jesus as the “Lamb once slain” and also “raised from the dead.” To Him the hymn attributes thanks and praise, crowning each stanza with that blessed word of faith: Amen.

Stanza two is one that beautifully illustrates the significance of the Christ’s coming into the world. In poetic language, the hymn confesses rightly that our Lord had been working in and through men since the foundation of the world, “... deep in prophets’ sacred page,...

grand in poets’ wing-ed word, slowly in type, from age to age, the nations saw their coming Lord...” He is the King of Israel, the one like Moses, the very paschal Lamb, whose blood covers our iniquity. All of this took place under the darkness of the age before the incarnation of Christ. The stanza continues, “Till through the deep Judean night rang out the song, ‘Good will to men!’ Sung once by firstborn sons of light [angels], it echoes now, ‘Good-will!’ Amen.” Christ, the Light has come into the darkened world, now in His own form, no longer hidden in type.

Stanza three alludes to the suffering and death of Christ, as things which have been completed. “That life of truth, those deeds of love, that death so steeped in hate and scorn - these all are past...” and confesses the reality that Jesus, the Christ, is on the Heavenly throne, adored by angels, and preparing to return one final time to the earth. “Lift up your heads, your King awaits, we lift them up. Amen, amen.”

Stanza four which was stanza five in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, leaves us in the throneroom of Heaven, “Worthy the Lamb enthroned to reign, all glory, pow’r! Amen, amen.”

In the perceived darkness of this present age, we await the revelation of our Lord, Jesus. We celebrate His birth, that darkened Judean night that has been illuminated with the birth of the eternal King. We also await the day when He comes again in glory, to judge both the living and the dead, He whose kingdom has no end.

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